

WISCONSIN JUDICIAL SYSTEM OVERVIEW



SUPREME COURT

- Seven Justices;
- Justices elected statewide to 10-year non-partisan terms;
- Court of last resort with appellate jurisdiction over all Wisconsin courts;
- During the 2024-25 term, the Court reviewed 522 petitions for review, of which 22 were granted.

COURT OF APPEALS

- Intermediate appellate court created in 1978;
- Four districts handle appeals of rulings from the lower courts in a county or group of counties;
- Composed of 16 judges in four locations: Madison (5), Milwaukee (4), Waukesha (4), and Wausau (3);
- Judges elected to six-year terms in district wide non-partisan elections;
- In 2024, the Court of Appeals handled 2,476 cases.

CIRCUIT COURTS

- Single-level trial (circuit) court since 1978;
- 261 circuit court judges in 72 counties;
- Judges elected for six-year non-partisan terms in spring elections;
- Milwaukee County is the largest jurisdiction with 47 judges;
- 23 counties have or share one judge;
- Six counties are paired together, with one circuit comprised of one or two branches shared by two counties.

MUNICIPAL COURTS

- 227 municipal courts in Wisconsin;
- 219 municipal court judges;
- Milwaukee has the largest number of municipal courts with three full-time judges;
- Madison has the only other full-time municipal court, created in 1992.

TRIBAL COURTS

- 11 tribal courts (10 with appellate process);
- Generally have jurisdiction over civil and tribal law matters;
- State courts have jurisdiction over criminal matters.

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ADMINISTRATIVE / MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Article VII, section 4(3) of the Wisconsin Constitution provides that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court shall be the administrative head of the judicial system and shall exercise this administrative authority pursuant to procedures adopted by the Supreme Court.

Wisconsin State Statute (758.19) and Supreme Court Rule (SCR Chapter 70) provide for the Director of State Courts Office. SCR 70.01 makes the Director the chief non-judicial officer of the court system.

For administrative purposes, the circuit courts are divided into nine judicial administrative districts. The districts range in size from one county (Milwaukee) in District One, to 13 counties in District Ten, which encompasses the northwestern part of the state.

The Supreme Court selects a chief judge in each district to supervise court administration in that district. A chief judge may serve up to three two-year terms or more at the pleasure of the Court. Each district also has a district court administrator who is a permanent employee of the Director of State Courts Office. The district court administrator is assisted by a district court administrative assistant, and the office is generally located in the largest city in the judicial district.

EMPLOYEES

As of July 1st, 2025, the state's court system had 859.60 full-time equivalent positions, including all 284 judges and Justices.

BUDGET

For the 2025-26 fiscal year, the court system budget is \$185.1 million annually, of which \$165.5 million is tax dollars.